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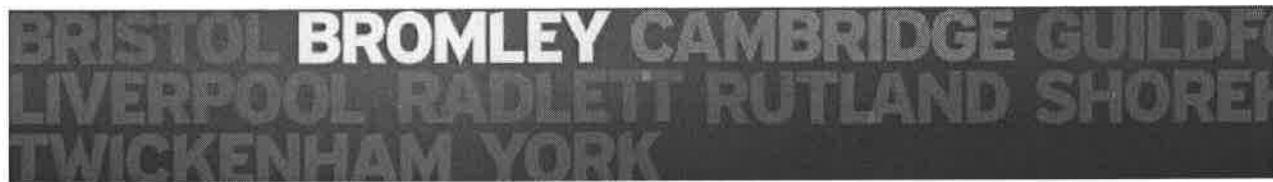
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Armstrong hits back at WADA doping claims

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by admin

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Following an article in a January issue of *Le Monde* newspaper in which Dick Pound, president of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), discussed doping within professional cycling, Lance Armstrong sent a strongly worded open letter to the European press rebutting Pound's comments.

Today Pound responded with an open letter of his own and the controversy looks set to continue. See below for the full text of both letters.

Lance Armstrong to WADA's President, Dick Pound:

In my name and in the name of the professional cycling community, I am obliged to answer the assertions of Mr. Dick Pound made in the January 28, 2004 edition of the Paris newspaper Le Monde.

Mr. Pound, attacking to our sport, declared: "The public well knows that bicyclists in the Tour of France and others take forbidden substances."

I am amazed and am saddened that a person in the position of Mr. Pound (President of the World Anti-Doping Agency) can make such a generalized statement that clearly means that me, or my colleagues, dope.

I have told before him and I am going to repeat it: I think I must be the most controlled athlete on this planet, I have never been tested positive in any anti-doping test and I don't take any drugs intended to improve performance.

However, I learned over the years that, even testing negative, it is very difficult to convince people who simply don't want to believe that my sporting results can be possible without pharmaceutical products.

I can understand this. But for Mr. Pound to state that I take drugs, or that my cycling colleagues of the Tour do, is simply ill-considered and unacceptable.

Every sport has dopage problems. Cycling is definitely a sport that had its problems. But who can deny that we cleaned it up? The UCI and promoters of the Tour have shown their diligence in this fight. The Tour of France is one of the most controlled sporting events to the world. In 2003, I underwent tests before the race, then each day I wore the yellow jersey or when I won a stage. The controls are done by the French Ministry of Sports and all samples are analyzed by a Paris laboratory that is an official French national laboratory of an excellent standard, accredited by the CIO and the AMA.

Thus, the way Mr. Pound points the finger at us is insulting. Here is an interesting statistic coming straight from the AMA: The last year, of the 710 tests of the AMA performed in the area of cycling, there were 4 clear verdicts of dopage. This is a rate of 0.56% positive results. But nevertheless, Mr. Pound feels authorized to make generalized statements that are obviously false and in contradiction with results of his own organization.

Maybe Mr. Pound believes, as it seems, that negative tests don't prove that athletes are clean. But if this is true, we must then assume that no athlete is clean. Is this indeed the position of the AMA? Should a person with such a conviction be directing the most important anti-dopage agency in the world? My answer is no.

Mr. Pound, many athletes in the world place great hopes in the AMA. Athletes want that their sport clean. I am quite convinced of the importance of an agency such as the AMA and I respect the impact that it has on the sport in general, not only on cycling.

Besides, my eyes are open: I know that there would not be the AMA if there were not doping, but this is not a reason to affirm that athletes are not clean, even when their tests are negative. Such statements are simply imprudent and unjust.

Mr. Pound, if you indeed want athletes that are clean, fight for it instead of soiling their reputations in a mindless way. I ask for you to concentrate your efforts in the fight against the dopage rather than spending your time accusing innocent athletes without proof other than your own speculation.

WADA President Dick Pound's response to Lance Armstrong:

First, let me say how pleased I am to hear the commitment that the winner of the last five Tours de France has made to the fight against doping in sport. I'm also happy to see that you acknowledge that cycling "had its problems." While it's tempting to believe that cycling has cleaned up its act, as you so claim, recent incidents suggest otherwise. As an example, the recent Cofidis affair, where certain cyclists and their entourages were found to allegedly be trafficking in doping substances, leads me to believe there remains a great deal of work to be done.

In the interview that I gave the newspaper Le Monde in January, I simply pointed out that cycling, like other sports, faces substantial difficulties in ridding sport of doping, despite efforts made by the International Cycling Federation and others. The Cofidis affair is but the latest in a long line of incidents, and other persons, including Jean-Francois Lamour, France's sports minister, have also expressed their concern and urged the world of cycling to clean up its house as quickly as possible.

As the organization charged with coordinating the fight against doping in sport, the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) must point out the problem areas and sports and sound the alarm when necessary. We have done it in the past, for cycling and other sports, and I, as the president of this organization, will ensure that we will continue to do so as long as doping exists.

We are at a particularly crucial juncture in the fight against doping in sport. For the first time, the sports world and governments are joining in this fight through WADA. Governments have tools at their disposal that sports organizations do not, including the ability to fight trafficking of doping substances across borders, which was demonstrated in the Festina and Cofidis affairs. The World Anti-Doping Code, the first document harmonizing rules regarding doping across all sports and all countries, has been accepted and is being implemented by sports organizations this year.

Governments will follow by 2006 through an international convention. UCI is, unfortunately, one of the few international sports federations that has yet to sign this important document or to provide a clear indication as to when it will do so.

Finally, at no time have I spoken out personally against you or your accomplishments, which makes your strongly-worded personal attack somewhat of a surprise. If, indeed, we share the same desire to see all sports free of drugs, I should have thought that we should both be supporting a harmonization of the anti-doping rules and that you should not be making a claim, about your sport generally, that suggests the problem is all but solved.

At any rate, the message I prefer to take from your letter is your strong commitment to making sure your sport is clean. The future of sport depends on acknowledging the problem of doping and coming together – athletes, governments, sports organizations, coaches, trainers and sponsors – to find a solution. WADA, more than ever, counts on athletes like yourself and international federations such as UCI to help with this fight.

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